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Signs Mounting That Cuba Will Free 1,113 Prisoners

CPYRGHT

Reports from Havana indicated yesterday that an accord was in prospect in negotiations for the release of the 1,113 anti-Castro prisoners captured in the unsuccessful invasion of the south coast of Cuba in April, 1961.

But a spokesman in Havana for the Cuban Families Committee for Liberation denied that agreement had been reached.

Mrs. Berta Barreto de los Heros, liaison officer for the group, said another meeting was scheduled to be held tomorrow.

Meanwhile, as has been the case in the past, rumors as to the imminent release of the prisoners swept refugee circles in Miami. The wife of one captive said she had heard that the prisoners, in small groups, were already being landed in Florida.

There was no confirmation of any change in the status of the men taken on the beach at Girón.

James B. Donovan is the principal negotiator for the committee. He was credited with having obtained the release of the U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers. Mr. Donovan, who is Democratic-Liberal candidate for Senator in New York State, resumed the negotiations with Premier Fidel Castro's Government on Friday.

The current talks represent the second stage of the situation that has developed since Mr. Donovan assumed a key role. The Brooklyn attorney met with Dr. Castro for four hours on Aug. 31 and for two hours on the following day.

Mr. Donovan then returned to the United States, asserting that the discussions were progressing favorably.

Official circles in Washington declined yesterday to comment on the supposed developments. The government has always taken the line that the negotia-

tions are a private matter, but it is known that several official agencies take a deep interest in the Cuban prisoner question.

Moreover, it is generally doubted that any accord could be reached without at least the tacit approval of Washington.

Mrs. Barreto, at whose home in Havana Dr. Castro and Mr. Donovan conferred, said: "We are very optimistic. Perhaps Sunday or Monday an announcement will be issued." Until then, she added, there will be no official word.

The prisoner issue has long been a delicate one, both for the United States Government and for the captives' families. Altogether, nearly 1,200 men were taken in the abortive landing.

In June, 1961, a committee set up to exchange tractors for the prisoners was established with White House encouragement, but this brought political and psychological complications that led to its being disbanded. On July 5, 1961 the Cuban Families Committee for Liberation was formed.

In connection with its efforts to raise the \$62,000,000 demanded by Premier Castro, a group of ten prisoners went to Miami in the summer of 1961, on parole. Two of the ten "defected"—refused to go back. The others, amid cheers and tears at Miami International Airport, returned voluntarily to incarceration.

Subsequently, 63 captives have been released, on payments of cash ranging up to \$50,000. The total still held is usually put at 1,113.